

Chapter 11

Facilitating Community Development Following Disruption



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Learning Objectives

This chapter discusses environmental influences stemming from past and current oppressive societal critical events that may disrupt the intergenerational transmission of resilience and interfere with client or constituency social functioning. When social workers recognize the intersection of historical and structural oppression and present-day concerns, they are better able to help clients resist discrimination-related stress and to support the transmission of personal and collective resilience. On completing this chapter, you should better understand how group affiliation and personal identity are intertwined and can be strengthened using micro to macro level skills from the resilience-enhancing stress model (RESM). You should be prepared to answer the following questions:

- What is the connection between historical critical events and current individual and collective discrimination-related stress or risks?
- What is the role of culture in bolstering resilience?
- How does a social worker use a grand narrative to foster group affiliation and resilient social functioning?
- How is resilience transmitted across generations?

This chapter discusses the use of the RESM narrative method with members of oppressed communities who may face chronic discriminatory risk. Although every person's story is unique, the narrative method of interviewing has the potential to

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reveal social and cultural life meanings that can be tapped to enhance resilience at both the personal and community levels. The social worker's clinical interview is therefore expanded from a narrower focus on personal concerns to broader historical and sociocultural factors. This shift in practice focus involves social workers synthesizing narrative assessment data that can then be used to ameliorate personal, community, and societal distress.

To inform skills and to help social workers accomplish these practice goals, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section describes narrative skills that can be used to address historical trauma related to the past long-standing US government practice of forcibly removing tribal nation children from their homes and relocating them in boarding schools. The ways in which Indigenous tribal nations have resisted the effects of this negative critical event and transmitted resilience from generation to generation are described. The second section discusses how citizens of New Orleans's Ninth Ward struggled with environmental racism associated with their experience during Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The ways in which their mutual aid efforts dovetailed with their inherent resilience are explored.

11.1 Historical Trauma: Indigenous Boarding Schools

11.1.1 The RESM and Responding to Stress

Resilience is people's capacity to deal with stressors and sustain, maintain, or reconstruct functional competence (Greene, 2014). Stress may be acute or arise from a sudden event. Stress may be chronic or stem from the wear and tear of ongoing everyday life, or it may have historical origins that are related to past adverse critical events.

According to Strumpfer (2002), the process of "resilient" starts when someone perceives a challenge or threat. He contended that resilience can be an individual or collective response and can be manifested during life transitions, in the aftermath of natural disasters or war, or during experiences of discrimination or persecution.

11.1.2 A Person–Environment (P-E) Shift

11.1.2.1 Interacting Ethnosystems and Institutions

Ecological theorists suggest that stress is the result of an imbalance between a person and the environment. From this point of view, a social worker's role is to increase clients' understanding of and resistance to such stress and to help them strengthen their functional capacity.

The shift in emphasis in resilience-enhancing practice to an all-encompassing P-E point of view can further the social worker's capacity to enhance resilience as a multilevel phenomenon. The perspective also expands the reach of the narrative interview to an examination of macrolevel forces that allow social workers to examine the history of unjust interactions between a particular ethnic subpopulation and larger US societal institutions.

Understanding the United States's many ethnosystems as a group bound together by their shared, unique historical and cultural ties, with each group exerting a relative degree of societal power, can provide insight into how the group has interacted with mainstream society over time (Solomon, 1976). Has the group had equal opportunity to participate in society and an equitable distribution of goods and services? Do its members now experience a sense of local control?

Unfortunately, ethnic groups may bear the brunt of prejudices that limit their members' full participation in society. These oppressive prejudices may restrict their political power and limit environmental justice, and they may be manifested in environmental and structural racism. (Brulle & Jenkins, 2005; Brulle & Pellow, 2006). This prejudicial environmental context places a responsibility on social workers to use anti-oppressive practice strategies.

Using an anti-oppressive process necessitates having knowledge of historical and current social policies and services and the role of policy in service delivery through a rights-based, anti-oppressive, and anti-racist lens (Council on Social Work Education, 2022, p. 10). Basic terms and processes (Table 11.1) and timelines of critical historical events experienced by Indigenous (Table 11.2) and African American (Table 11.3) ethnic groups illuminate factors that may help inform resilience-enhancing practice from an anti-oppressive point of view.

11.1.3 Understanding Multiple Levels of Resilience

As social workers cocreate and reconstruct client and constituency narratives at a sociocultural societal level, their clinical attention is focused on stressors at all levels of resilience:

The personal level of resilience encompasses how an individual perceives a critical event (e.g., discrimination). It involves ascertaining clients' inner meaning of events and fostering their competence under difficult conditions.

The interpersonal level of resilience refers to interactions among family and friends. It encompasses facilitating clients' formation of nurturing relationships that provide support during adverse situations.

The sociocultural level of resilience refers to the social meaning associated with experiencing adversity while living in a certain society in a particular time and place. Clients' sociocultural resilience is enhanced when they participate in their culture of origin as well as learn about others.

Table 11.1 Basic terms and processes

Term	Definition	Process
Environmental justice	Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies	“Environmental justice occurs when all people equally experience high levels of environmental protection and no group or community is excluded from the environmental policy decision-making process, nor is affected by a disproportionate impact from environmental hazards” (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 20)
Environmental racism	Environmental racism refers to policies, practices, or directives that differentially affect or disadvantage individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color (Bullard, 2004)	Environmental racism occurs when communities of color or those with less income are exposed to higher environmental risk
Oppression	Oppression is the withholding of power by the dominant group(s) in society	Oppression occurs when a dominant group(s) imposes a negative value on others and assumes greater political, economic, and social power over them (hooks, 1984). Although power exists in most societies and is inherent in social interaction, when power is abused, it constitutes a risk to the human condition (Goldenberg, 1978)
Structural racism	Structural racism refers to “any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color” (Chavis, 1993, p. iii)	Structural racism occurs when there is “the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal—that routinely advantage white people while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color” (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004). Structural racism has been and remains a fundamental cause of persistent disparities in access to resources and services (Churchwell et al., 2020)

The societal/structural level of resilience encompasses social policies, power relations, and economic conditions that affect institutional structures in which clients participate. It also involves clients being able to obtain resources such as housing, education, and health care.

Large-scale ecological resilience involves the stability and well-being of habitats in which people, many species of animals, and plants live. A classic definition of *ecological resilience* is a “measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability

Table 11.2 Timeline: Historical and sociocultural events experienced by US tribal nations

16,000 BCE	The Indigenous populations of the United States migrate across the Bering Strait to North and South America. They eventually build large city-states known for their expansive architecture and governing bodies (Mann, 2005)
1492	The Native population of North America north of the Rio Grande totals 7–10 million. Indigenous people group themselves into approximately 600 tribes and speak diverse dialects
1492–1775	Materials are traded between Natives and Europeans
1622–1924	The American Indian Wars are waged by European colonialists and later the US government against tribal nations across what is now the United States. Between 1800 and 1900, American Indians lose more than half their population, and their proportion of the total US population drops from 10.15% to 0.31%
1830	President Andrew Jackson signs the Indian Removal Act, which claims the lands east of the Mississippi River where tribal nations are located and forcibly resettles the inhabitants in lands west of the Mississippi
1838	President Andrew Jackson ignores the U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned the relocations, enforcing his Indian Removal Act of 1830. The Cherokee people are forcibly moved from their homeland and relocated to Indian Territory, now Oklahoma. This is known as the Trail of Tears
1869–1960s	Hundreds of thousands of Native American children are removed from their homes and families and placed in boarding schools operated by the federal government and churches
1887	The Dawes Act authorized the US president to break up Indian land
1890	Sitting Bull, a Teton Dakota tribal leader of rebellions, is assassinated; the Wounded Knee Massacre occurs
1934	The Indian New Deal abolished the land allotment act of 1887
1924	The Indian Citizenship Act is passed into law
1968	The Indian civil Rights Act recognized tribal nations self-government
1978	The Indian Child Welfare Act is passed to oversee the placement of indigenous children in foster care
2015	The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers approves a route for the Dakota Access Pipeline that passes through Standing Rock Sioux tribal nation land. The tribe holds demonstrations to protect their land, which is a valuable cultural resource
2021	The U.S. Department of the Interior releases a historic investigative report on the federal Indian boarding school system

to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations” (Holling, 1973, p. 14). Disruption in habitats, such as erosion caused by climate change, can have a negative ripple effect throughout all social systems in which people interact.

The practice example in Box 11.1 describes the consequences of a sociocultural and societal crisis among tribal nations that involved the US government forcibly removing tribal nation children to boarding schools for the purpose of acculturation or “reeducation.”

Table 11.3 Timeline: historical and sociocultural events experienced by African Americans

1619	The first African slaves are brought to Virginia. Chattel slavery is first recorded as a legal system that makes free African people property
1704–1845	During the era of slavery, slave patrols and night watches made up of adult White males are created to monitor the movement of slaves. Slaves who attempted to escape are severely punished. Chattel slavery plays a key role in the development of large plantations in the South
1787	The Constitutional Congress legislates the three fifths compromise, according to which an enslaved person is counted as three fifths of a human being
1793	A federal fugitive slave law is enacted
1830s	Most southern states forbid the teaching of reading to enslaved people
1837	Cheyney University of Pennsylvania is established as the first historically Black college or university
1863	President Abraham Lincoln issues the emancipation proclamation, freeing all slaves in areas of rebellion
1865	The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution officially abolishes slavery
1868	The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides equal protection under the law
1870	The Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits any government in the United States from preventing people from voting based on race
1896	Jim Crow laws, which segregate Blacks from Whites, are made constitutional, enabling the government to legislate where Blacks are allowed to eat, live, drink, and go to school
1909	The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded and begins to act for political and social change
1954	The U.S. Supreme Court declares school segregation illegal in <i>Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka</i>
1960–1970s	Three presidential commissions make recommendations for changes in policing. Research and training eventually lead to the community policing movement, which is based on improving community contact, forming trust, and enhancing communication
1964	The Civil Rights Act is passed, which prohibits discrimination in public places, provides for the integration of schools and other public facilities, and makes employment discrimination illegal
2013	The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter begins to circulate in response to the extrajudicial killings of 313 Black people by police, security guards, and vigilantes
2020	George Perry Floyd, Jr., an African American man, is murdered by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during an arrest

Box 11.1: Practice Example: Personal Is Political: Returning to the Sacred Path

It is not uncommon for members of tribal nations who experience behavioral health issues to first seek out help from their tribal elders. Therefore, Mr. and Mrs. River, and their 12-year-old son Nova (“chaser of butterflies”) met with tribal elders to discuss their worries about Nova’s difficulties in school. In addition, Mr. River relayed that he was having flashbacks of his confinement

in a US government boarding school during the late 1960s. (The reaction to this wounding, which Brave Heart, 1998, called the *historical trauma response*, often includes survivor guilt, depression, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder, physical symptoms, psychic numbing, anger, suicidal ideation, and fixation to trauma.)

The elders discussed plans to help the family “return to the sacred path,” a balanced place of peace found through the enactment of tribal customs and rituals. As they sat together in a healing circle, the elders and the River family shared information about Indigenous healing ceremonies. The family was encouraged to use traditional tribal healing techniques such as spiritual songs, dance, and meditation to reduce Mr. River’s feeling that he was personally responsible for undoing a painful historical past. The family was also referred to a group intervention program on resolving grief and reducing collective group trauma. The program, which was held at a local clinic, was specially designed to incorporate Indigenous cultural beliefs.

11.1.4 Practice Analysis: Steps Taken

11.1.4.1 From Historical Trauma to Posttraumatic Growth

Maria Brave Heart (1998), a licensed clinical social worker and member of the Lakota tribal nation, was among the first to call practitioners’ attention to the concept of historical trauma in clinical practice with Indigenous people. She recommended an evidence-based approach to practice that embeds information about a client’s or constituency’s cultural heritage into the narrative helping process.

There is increasing evidence that this perspective on trauma strengthens ethnic group membership and cultural ties, which serve as protective factors, buffering people from the negative effects of trauma and supporting resilient functioning across generations. This is in tune with research that suggests that most people who have undergone trauma rebuild their lives and that some experience posttraumatic growth (Bonanno, 2012; Greene et al., 2009; Janoff-Bulman, 1992, 2004). The concept of posttraumatic growth suggests that many people who have experienced trauma may encounter new possibilities or find anchors in their lives and then move forward to create positive change (Goldfein, 2004).

11.1.5 Practitioner Readiness: Adopting a Theoretical Framework

To help ameliorate trauma and help an Indigenous family return to the sacred path, social workers may want to adapt their practice to fit the cultural context of the family. To do this, practitioners who work with populations experiencing discriminatory

stress may turn to Terry Cross's (1998) relational view of the development of the self. The relational view holds that the development of the self is shaped by the collective in which one lives, connecting community, clan, culture, and social history.

In addition, personal identity involves the characteristics of mind, body, and spirit:

Mind encompasses a person's thoughts, memories, knowledge, and emotional processes.

Body includes all physical aspects of the person.

Spirit incorporates metaphysical and innate factors.

As seen in the practice example in Box 11.2, Ronald, the social worker at the local behavioral health agency, began to apply these concepts to better understand how past critical events had become rooted in the River family's present-day grand narrative.

Box 11.2: Practice Example: Family Communication: Returning to the Sacred Path

Ronald: Hello. I am proud to know that the elders sent you to us. I am hoping to start to get to know you today. What can you tell me?

Mr. River: I am not sure why the elders sent us here. Many years ago, I returned to the reservation to work after finishing trade school. I am proud to say that I have held down a job ever since. My wife, who is a teacher's aide, is much younger, and we have a wonderful son, Nova.

Ronald: What else should I learn about you all?

Mrs. River: I think we are good parents. We tell our son about the sacred path. I don't know why he doesn't get along at school.

Ronald: I hope you are willing to spend several meetings with me to learn just what that is about. I have found that such conversations create a family story.

Nova: I wouldn't mind doing that. I knew nothing about the boarding school business before we met with the elders.

Mrs. River: We didn't think telling you would be a good thing. Why do you want to know?

Nova: My teacher says we should know our history and be proud.

Mr. River: Why be proud? We were rounded up, driven miles away, thrown into a school, and pushed around.

Nova: Maybe that is why you have bad dreams and I can't sleep?

Mrs. River: Don't tell me you are one of those boys who sleeps in class?

Ronald: I think you have set the topic for our conversations at our next meetings. Does that work for you three?

Mr. River: If the two of them listen carefully.

Ronald: Okay then. Why don't I give you some homework to help you with that. Can you each bring a letter of introduction that you write about yourself to our next meeting? We can read them together.

Mr. River: Sounds like a place to start.

11.1.5.1 Practice Analysis: Steps Taken

The amelioration of the negative lingering effects of historical trauma in the River family began when the family met with the tribal elders. It was followed up by Ronald at the behavioral health agency. Both helping processes emphasized the effects of the separation of families and the forced assimilation of the boarding school experience that had led to acculturative stress. It became clear that the negative feelings Mr. River was experiencing had begun when he had been forced to incorporate the values, beliefs, language, and customs of the dominant society at boarding school.

11.1.6 Engagement

As can be seen from this practice example, building a RESM relationship necessitates an understanding of the historical and sociocultural factors of the organizations, communities, and people for whom practice has been designed. Therefore, resilience-enhancing social workers take a learning stance and, when possible, first engage with and learn from local leaders.

Engagement also means demonstrating transparency about wanting to attain an anchored understanding of the community to be served. Achieving an anchored understanding requires having the knowledge and skills to comprehend the space that other people occupy. In the practice example of the River family, social worker Ronald drew on tribal grand narratives to uncover local knowledge related to historical legacies, spiritual ceremonies, and prayers, all of which was intended to help the family heal. A third space is developed when “a client and social worker from different cultures negotiate and communicate to co-create new meanings and relationships” (Yan & Wong, 2005, p. 186).

11.1.7 Assessment: Coconstructing a Grand Narrative

The cocreated narrative is composed of intertwining strands that come together to create a grand narrative or master plot. Thus, it can be said that a narrative is both personal and political and shapes how people see themselves and their world. According to Kenyon and Randall (2001), this perspective on the narrative leaves the door open for it to be “re-storied” or transformed and increases the storyteller’s capacity to grow.

Assessment from a RESM perspective involves social workers listening to constituencies’ voices and learning about critical historical events. Practitioners then chart clients’ P-E dimensions and develop an assessment profile. They also turn to concepts associated with the relational self to learn about the balance among mind, body, and spirit (Brave Heart et al., 2011).

11.1.7.1 Listening to Voices

Listening to the grand narratives of ethnic minority communities is a means of understanding the multiple losses expressed across generations of oppressed people that often shape individual and collective identity. Unfortunately, the voices of the oppressed are often silenced (Bruner, 1986). However, when social workers engage in cocreating a client narrative, the storyteller and story listener become partners in the helping process (White & Epston, 1990). In other words, therapeutic conversations are a form of action or “personal liberation” (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 25).

11.1.7.2 Learning About Critical Historical Events

A RESM assessment allows a social worker to learn how a client or constituency has made meaning of critical events as well as how they have mustered their personal and collective resources to deal with overwhelming demands (Gutheil & Congress, 2000). Practitioners hopefully tap these resources and assets as they work with oppressed groups. The skills in Box 11.3 may be useful in this regard.

11.1.7.3 Mapping P-E Dimensions: The Assessment Profile

11.1.7.3.1 P-E Dimensions

Ronald conducted a RESM assessment that began with mapping 10 P-E dimensions (Chap. 5, Box 5.3) as they related to the River family’s risks and protective factors. The mapping of the River family’s P-E dimensions appears in Table 11.4 and reveals the close connections among personal, tribal, and historical critical events. Identifying and affirming these important social links acted as healing factors that contributed to Mr. River’s and his family’s return to their sacred path.

11.1.7.3.2 Mind, Body, and Spirit Balance

Ronald’s assessment in collaboration with the River family also involved reflecting on mind, body, and spirit. This revealed that Mr. River’s thoughts and memories of his boarding school days dominated the family narrative.

Box 11.3: Skill Box: RESM Interview Skills for Societal Inclusiveness

Skill	Definition
Diffusing power differentials	Partnering with clients in the helping process
Challenging stigmas	Confronting false personal and collective images
Building on cultural beliefs	Learning about and encouraging local values and views

Table 11.4 Person–environment (P-E) assessment chart: the River family

P-E dimension	Indicator
Consequences of time and place	The Sioux tribal nation took part in a healing network prompted by Maria Brave Heart’s mental health initiative for Indigenous people
Response to the stress of past critical events	Mr. River experienced historical trauma stemming from his experience of forced attendance at a boarding school
Reaction to disruption of biopsychosocial and spiritual processes	The River family sought help to return to a sacred path—a balance of mind, body, and spirit
Family response to adversity or change	The River family banded together and sought help from their tribal elders as well as a behavioral health agency
Consequences of social supports	The social support structures of the River family’s tribal nation served as a buffer against risk
Significance of favorable environments	Although the tribal nation was nurturing, oppressive larger scale institutional structures often were not
Effects of strong cultural identity	Strong cultural ties acted as protective factors for the River family
Effects of human rights violations	There have been lingering effects of historical trauma on members of tribal nations. The abuses may contribute to posttraumatic stress, suicide, and depression
Concerns about insufficient resources and services	Resources and services are often insufficient for tribal nations. Many people live below the poverty line
Response to degradation of ecosystems	Tribal nations feel the ripple effects or repercussions of mainstream government projects that degrade local habitats

11.1.7.3.3 Assessment Profile

Although historical trauma can be transmitted from generation to generation, so too can resiliency. When reflecting on the River family’s assessment profile, the social worker and client family turned to solutions that encompassed strong family and cultural bonds that acted as powerful healing factors.

11.1.8 Intervention

Interventions to resist societal structural inequities can encompass family therapeutic services and larger scale interventions that mobilize social change, develop innovative programs, and take congressional action.

11.1.8.1 Uniting Therapeutic Techniques

As was the situation with the River family, tribal nation child welfare facilities can combine traditional healing methods with behavioral mental health techniques. According to Brave Heart and Deschenie (2006), behavioral interventions may involve individual, family, and group therapy; telepsychiatry; parent support groups;

coaching and training; emergency mental health support; and case management. Traditional healing methods rooted in cultural understanding and traditional practices of childrearing can include being in nature, storytelling, planting, traditional song and dance, beading, and horseback riding.

11.1.8.2 Mobilizing Social Change

Child welfare programs for Indigenous children have not always been under local control. One initiative that has led the way in empowering community members and creating child welfare systems of care congruent with local practices (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005) is the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). Led by executive director Terry Cross, a clinical social worker and member of the Seneca tribal nation, NICWA has spearheaded a movement of organizational change to return the auspices of child welfare services to local communities. As can be seen in the practice example in Box 11.4, NICWA works with communities to better match services with community needs and resources, deepen relationships and partnerships, and strengthen cultural ties. As this knowledge is disseminated and adopted locally, resilience is enhanced.

11.1.8.3 Actualizing Innovation

In the spirit of local control, the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe has developed a first-of-its-kind intentional community of foster care for Indigenous families and their children. In 2020 the Sioux tribal nation built a children's village called Simply

Box 11.4: Practice Example: Community-Based Advocacy and Sociocultural History

To advance social change, NICWA conducts local research forums with Indigenous tribal nations and people of color who are interested in cultural sensitivity and increased local control. The movement attempts to redress the historical fact that in 1860, when the US government's Bureau of Indian Affairs established the first boarding school, traditional childrearing practices were severely disrupted. The purpose of the boarding schools, which were usually located far from local communities, was to educate or acculturate Indigenous children in the United States with White mainstream values and culture (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2021). Parents who resisted could be imprisoned, and children could be removed from their homes by force. This practice continued into the late 1960s.

Advocacy activities conducted by NICWA are shaped by the knowledge that Indigenous families and communities originally based their systems of child care on their cultural practices, laws, and traditions. It is hoped that children can once again be viewed as gifts from the creator and that parents, extended family, and the clan can be responsible for fostering the spirit of the child.

Smiles on their reservation in La Plant, South Dakota. The children's village was built with the collaboration of the Department of Social Services, tribal elders, and Native foster parents and can house up to 18 children. The priorities of the Simply Smiles children's village include providing mental health services when needed, keeping sibling groups together, and supporting the reunification of children with the biological family.

11.1.8.4 Continuing Advocacy

The legacy of the forced assimilation of Indigenous children in government-run boarding schools remains today. In 2021, under the direction of Deb Haaland, President Joe Biden's Secretary of the Interior and the first Native American to serve as a US cabinet secretary, the Department of the Interior released a historic investigative report on the federal Indian boarding school system (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2021). According to Haaland,

We continue to see the evidence of this attempt to forcibly assimilate Indigenous people in the disparities that communities face.... It is my priority to not only give voice to the survivors and descendants of federal Indian boarding school policies but also to address the lasting legacies of these policies so Indigenous peoples can continue to grow and heal. (Scherer, 2022, paras. 5, 35)

11.1.9 Evaluation

The practice strategies devised to return members of tribal nations to their sacred path have been evaluated by Maria Brave Heart and her team at the Takini Network. The Takini Network is a collective of Lakota, Sioux, and other Native natural, grass-roots helpers and human service professionals whose mission is to improve the quality of life for Indigenous people by helping them transcend and heal from historical trauma. *Takini* is a Lakota word meaning "survivor or one who has been brought back to life."

Researchers from the Takini Network have found that participants in various locally run, culturally sound programs have a reduction in feeling responsible for undoing a painful historical past; experience less shame, stigma, anger, sadness; and have decreased guilt, increased joy, an improved valuation of their true self and of the tribe, and an increased sense of personal power.

11.2 Historical Trauma: Hurricane Katrina

This section of the chapter expands the perspective on resilience to an examination of large-scale ecological resilience. It explores how disruption in the ecology or habitat of the Gulf Coast surrounding New Orleans has had a negative ripple effect across the region. The remainder of the chapter describes the effects Hurricane

Katrina had on human functioning as well as the discriminatory stress that resulted from the sustained social inequality experienced by citizens of New Orleans's Ninth Ward. The manner in which residents of New Orleans's Ninth Ward manifested their inherent resiliency is also explored.

11.2.1 New Orleans's Ninth Ward: A Disenfranchised Marginalized Community

Some communities experience a long-standing pattern of neglect. Such a pattern may emerge more frequently in communities in which there has been inequality and discrimination (Blundo, 2012). This was true of New Orleans's Ninth Ward, where over the years low-income African American residents received proportionately fewer goods and services. According to the U.S. Census Bureau Data Center (2022), as of 2022, 91% of New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward was Black, and 71% of its population lived below the poverty line (see Box 11.5).

Box 11.5: Practice Example: Hurricane Katrina, the Mississippi River, and Environmental Justice

The Ninth Ward, the poorest neighborhood in New Orleans, was once home to barbershops, banks, churches, and family homes. Then Hurricane Katrina made the problems of environmental racism and the need for environmental justice a stark reality. For years before Hurricane Katrina, scientists, journalists, and emergency officials worried about what would happen if a major hurricane were to hit New Orleans. In addition, it was well known that the Ninth Ward was in a flood zone with poorly structured levees.

Issues related to a proper response to the degradation of the surrounding ecosystem prevailed. A rise in sea levels and climate change put the region at environmental risk. To further compound the ecological damage, Mississippi wetlands were drained. Oil and gas companies contributed to the disruption by digging canals and burying pipelines. This caused nearby land to erode and wash away. By 2003, much of the area around New Orleans was 4.92–9.84 ft below sea level (U.S. Geological Survey, 2003).

The erosion of the Mississippi River was exacerbated by the fact that the levees that protected New Orleans had not been properly maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which administers the system of levees and floodwalls. As a result, Katrina resulted in more than 50 failures of the levees and floodwalls protecting New Orleans and caused flooding in 80% of the city. "In particularly hard-hit areas, like the Lower Ninth Ward, the water reached depths of up to 15 feet" (Pruitt, 2020, para. 4).

Hurricane Katrina did not just disrupt the ecology of the region; it caused hard-hitting damage to all social systems, including schools and hospitals. The practice example in Box 11.6 illustrates how the storm threatened the lives of residents.

Box 11.6: Practice Example: Hurricane Katrina, Sally Moore, and Her Family

Hurricane Katrina was one of the deadliest and costliest hurricanes to hit the United States. An estimated 1833 people died in the hurricane. The flooding that followed caused approximately \$161 billion in damage, and millions of people were left homeless (Mohr & Powell, 2007).

Just before Katrina hit, Sally Moore, a 50-year-old African American grandmother with diabetes, her daughter and her husband, and her two grandchildren drove around the Ninth Ward, a low-income neighborhood in New Orleans, trying to find a shelter that was not full. None were available. They returned to sleep at Sally's home in the Ninth Ward.

By two or three in the morning, the floodwaters, which had risen precipitously, were flooding the house. The family went across the street to the roof of a five-story apartment house, where they called 911. There was no response. They then tried to signal several helicopters circling them, but they were never airlifted.

By the next morning, Sally Moore and her family determined that the floodwaters were too high for them to remain on the roof and that they needed to get to the Louisiana Superdome taking shelter on their own. They took a camper top from a nearby truck and created a little boat for the children. Sally was put on a floating air mattress. Sally's daughter and son-in-law swam and pushed the makeshift boat and mattress to the bridge near the Superdome. There they encountered the Louisiana National Guard armed with tanks and pointing rifles. Sally yelled, "Don't scare the children! Put the rifles down!" The family was finally allowed to enter the Superdome.

After 2 weeks in the Superdome, Sally Moore was bused to a temporary shelter in Texas, where a social worker found her a home in a new high-rise apartment donated by a local philanthropist. Sally was referred to a doctor and attended church services and soon adjusted to her new environment. However, she told the social worker that she hoped to someday return to the Ninth Ward, where she could be reunited with her family, hang up her clothes on the outdoor clothesline, and say hello to her neighbor. Sally's social worker assessment profile appears in Table 11.5.

Table 11.5 Person–environment (P-E) assessment chart: Sally Moore and her family

P-E dimension	Indicator
Consequences of time and place	Sally Moore and her family lived in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. They experienced widespread devastation and discrimination
Response to the stress of past critical events	The Moore family was tightknit and over the years family members helped one another during adverse events
Reaction to disruption of biopsychosocial and spiritual processes	The Moore family responded quickly to the disruption caused by Hurricane Katrina
Family response to adversity or change	The Moore family met the disruption caused by Hurricane Katrina with innovative problem-solving solutions
Consequences of social supports	The Ninth Ward was known for enduring hardships and struggles (Lee, 2006)
Significance of favorable environments	Although the Moores' immediate environment was nurturing, oppressive larger scale institutional structures often were not
Effects of strong cultural identity	Sally Moore longed for her neighborhood after being relocated following Hurricane Katrina
Effects of human rights violations	The Moore family experienced human rights abuses during Hurricane Katrina that were exacerbated by living in the Ninth Ward
Concerns about insufficient resources and services	Citizens of the Ninth Ward had insufficient resources and services well before Hurricane Katrina
Response to degradation of ecosystems	The degradation of the habitat surrounding New Orleans had disastrous effects on the city and region

11.2.2 *Rebuilding a Naturally Resilient Community*

It took 17 years for New Orleans's Ninth Ward to begin to show signs of recovering from the widespread destruction of the hurricane. Insufficient resources and services compounded the stress of rebuilding. But on August 27, 2022, the Ninth Ward community held a celebration of what was termed their *inherent resiliency*. A local pastor was quoted as saying the following:

I think it showcases it [resiliency] to the highest level. When we came back from Katrina, there was nothing here. We have twenty feet of water where we stand. To see that people are coming back, now let me be perfectly clear. It's work, to rebuild this community and to bring it back to a level where people can understand and respect this community again. (Brand, 2022)

11.2.3 *Phases of RESM Recovery*

Social workers are often involved in recovery efforts following disruptive events such as Hurricane Katrina. They may work with the American Red Cross, FEMA, or international organizations such as the World Bank. The application of RESM practice principles is briefly described below.

11.2.3.1 Pre-engagement

Creating disaster recovery plans is a cardinal rule of disaster management. Such plans spell out the actions that must be taken by all major stakeholders before, during, and after a natural or human-made adverse critical event.

11.2.3.2 Engagement

Engagement following natural and human-made disasters is best accomplished through community development efforts that identify and bring together community stakeholders and local officials. Social work planners identify and reach out to vulnerable groups. Agendas for meetings should be transparent and reflect the needs of various subpopulations of the community.

11.2.3.3 Assessment

Social workers who collaborate on planning a risk assessment assist in outlining the parameters of the large-scale infrastructure and geographic location of the potential critical event. Equity in setting priorities and goals is paramount. Social workers practicing with individual clients and families such as the Moore's assess the critical event from an interpersonal person-environment perspective.

11.2.3.4 Intervention

The intervention phase of a recovery plan needs to consider how different social systems and levels of resilient functioning come into play. What can contribute to recovery at the personal, interpersonal, sociocultural, societal, and larger scale ecological levels of resilient functioning?

11.3 Summary and Conclusion

Historic traumatic events reflect a group's experience with loss and pain. When appropriate, the pain needs to be distinguished as stemming from a natural disaster or an event linked to societal injustice. In this way, the transmission of traumatic historical events from generation to generation can be understood within the context of resilience and posttraumatic growth.

Summary of Learning Outcomes

Keep in mind the following:

- Social workers can identify power abuses that result in systemic oppression.
- Social workers can play a role in combating oppression by ameliorating environmental and structural racism.

Discussion Questions

1. How does culture act as a protective factor for oppressed communities?
2. How would you learn about large-scale historical factors that influence your client's situation?

Chapter Exercise

Write a reflection paper on a client who has demonstrated a natural resilience response. How was this manifested?

Glossary

Ethnosystem A group bound together by shared, unique historical and cultural ties and a relative degree of societal power.

Local control Describing a situation in which services are constructed and delivered in a manner that is congruent with the culture of the people in the community that is being served.

Posttraumatic growth Growth that results from benefiting from or transforming following adversity.

Power differential A difference in power between groups of people based on perceived differences in valuation.

Relational view of development A view of the self as shaped by the collective in which one lives.

Resiling Responding to a challenge or threat, such as in the aftermath of a natural disaster or war, or discrimination or persecution.

Return to the sacred path Indigenous ceremonies and spiritual practices performed to heal.

Sociocultural history People's lived experiences and present telling of events.

Structural racism A form of discrimination that limits people's access to goods and services based on race.

Takini A Lakota term that means "survivor or one who has been brought back to life."

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